

Gallipoli campaign

{guh-lip'-uh-lee}

The Gallipoli campaign of 1915 was an Allied attempt to knock Ottoman Turkey out of WORLD WAR I and reopen a supply route to Russia. The initial plan, proposed by British First Lord of the Admiralty Winston CHURCHILL, called for an Allied fleet—mostly British—to force the Dardanelles Strait and then to steam to Constantinople to dictate peace terms.

On Feb. 19, 1915, a Franco-British fleet under British Vice Admiral Sackville Carden began systematic reduction of the fortifications lining the Dardanelles. The principal fortifications were attacked on March 18. Sixteen battleships—including the powerful Queen Elizabeth—provided the principal firepower. Just as the bombardment had silenced the Turkish batteries, however, three battleships were sunk in an undetected minefield, and three others were disabled. The Turks had nearly expended their ammunition, many of their batteries had been destroyed, and their fire-control communications were out of action. The Allies, however, did not know this. Rear Admiral John de Robeck, who had taken command when Carden fell ill, called off the attack and withdrew his ships from the strait.

In the meantime, the Allies had hastily assembled a force of 78,000 men and dispatched it from England and Egypt to Gallipoli. As his flotilla gathered near the peninsula, however, the commanding general, Ian Hamilton, discovered that guns and ammunition had been loaded on separate ships. The transports had to steam to Egypt to be properly loaded for combat. The Turks, now alerted to the Allied plan, used the resulting month's delay to improve their defenses. Some 60,000 Turkish troops, under the German general Otto Liman von Sanders, awaited the Allies.

On April 25, British and ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) troops landed at several points near the tip of the peninsula. Simultaneously, on the Asiatic side of the strait, the one French division made a diversionary landing, and off Bulair, on the neck of the peninsula, a naval force attempted to distract the Turks.

The Allied troops were soon pinned down in several unconnected beachheads, stopped by a combination of Turkish defenses and British mismanagement. Losses were high. The Turks ringed the tiny beachheads with entrenchments, and the British and ANZAC troops soon found themselves involved in trench warfare.

After three months of bitter fighting, Hamilton attempted a second assault—on the western side of the peninsula. This assault lacked adequate naval gunfire support; it failed to take any of its major objectives and resulted in heavy casualties. Hamilton was relieved on October 15, and by December 10 his replacement, Gen. Charles Monro, had evacuated the bulk of the troops and supplies. The remaining 35,000 men were withdrawn without the Turks realizing it on Jan. 8-9, 1916. By contrast with the operation as a whole, the withdrawal was a masterpiece of planning and organization, with no loss of life. Estimates of Allied casualties for the entire campaign are about 252,000, with the Turks suffering almost as many casualties—an estimated 251,000.

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